

***A Diverse Community***, Sam Ferguson, September 27, 2020

**Series Goal** | May our love for Christ, and Christ's love for us, foster a togetherness that bears witness to the Gospel of Hope, which we hold out to a weary and divided world.

Eph. 4:3 | "...eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Read the series goal and verse (Eph. 4:3). Do you see this happening in our church body? What might it look like for our church to have its unity bear witness?

**Key Scripture** | [Eph. 2](#)

**Sermon Outline & Questions**

*Opening thoughts—*

Sam was taking a walk around the church property and noticed that the fence separating the church from the hotel next door had been taken down. Over the summer people began congregating in hotel parking lot. These people were homeless and were being sheltered there in light of Covid-19. Though the physical barrier had been removed, Sam still felt that an impenetrable wall stood between them. Would any of them dare walk across the parking lot to the church?

Human beings are fallen and thus a penchant for putting up walls between each other for any number of reasons (education, success, ideology).

Even if you bring down a wall, it's an altogether different thing to go about building a true connection. Reconciling alienated people is difficult.

A community created by the gospel is a diverse community because the gospel can reconcile people who are otherwise alienated ([Eph. 2:11-22](#)).

What "walls" do you have in your life separating you from other people? Have you seen God tear down walls in the past?

**1. Walls rise up to heaven**

[vv. 11-12](#). There was a wall between Jews and Gentiles; the animosity was intense and ran both ways (vv. 11-12).

God's initial covenant with Abraham rested on an initial promise to Israel, but from its inception God intended Israel to be a light *to the Gentiles* ([Gen. 12:1-3](#)). However, after centuries of fear and fighting, Israel turned inward and put up walls. By the time of Jesus, the Jewish faith was very ethnocentric.

Jewish leaders increasingly saw God's favor as a mark of merit (superiority) rather than as a sheer gift of grace meant to be stewarded for others.

Walls between people are not merely about horizontal differences; they are about vertical realities (i.e., revealing judgements about another's actual worth and dignity; making a statement about one's maker.)

Physical disagreements (horizontal) → spiritual disdain (vertical). These walls reach heaven and cut off one person from another and from God.

When we sense a wall of division, we must ask ourselves if it's moving from common disparities to spiritual ones (judging others as inherently unworthy of God's grace).

Read the story of God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12). How might this passage help frame our perspective about community (to build connections instead of walls)? How is God at work?

What horizontal disagreements are prevalent in your life, or around you, today? Do you sense a vertical reality to them? Do any of these disagreements involve overlooking others' inherent dignity and worth?

## 2. The law can divide

[vv. 13-16](#). The Jews saw the law as a standard by which they were seen as clean (good) and the rest of the world was seen as unclean (bad).

This is our nature today, too. We create standards to see who is 'in' and who is 'out'. (e.g., educated vs. uneducated; talented vs. untalented; attractive vs. unattractive; successful vs. unsuccessful).

This creates at least two problems:

- Humans are tempted to become the ultimate judge of people's worth and right and wrong (i.e., a terrible sense of pride).
- The very standard by which we judge, we will live by (and we can never live up to it).

For fallen humans, an ultimate standard (law) divides our very selves. We realize we are not worthy of being seen fully by others or God.

What 'laws' do you find yourself holding others to? Do you ever feel weighed down by your own 'laws'? Do you ask Jesus for humility (the antidote to pride) each morning?

## 3. It is a man who reconciles

[vv. 13-18](#). The solution is not found in a theory, policy, or movement. It is found in the person of Jesus.

Sometimes a mediator (3<sup>rd</sup> party) needs to come in and help when a conflict reaches an impasse.

Jesus comes in as a mediator and mediates in two ways:

1. *Blood (v. 13)*. Reconciliation is costly.

Jesus' blood deals first with our need to be reconciled to God. The law is divisive because it shows us our sin. We need to be reconciled to God before being reconciled to our brothers and sisters.

The blood also speaks to our need for justice. The cross tells us that God is fiercely committed to justice. It shows his commitment to deal with sin and to right wrongs in an ultimate way.

2. *Peace (vv. 14-17)*. It is the goal of reconciliation.

The heart of reconciliation is an objective love of Christ, who is peace. (Christ says, “I see you; I will protect you; I hurt for you; I am committed to you (the person who was hurt) *and* to them (the person who hurt you).

Consider the life of Paul. There was a wall between Paul and early Christians. The church was resistant to his conversion at first. Only after several years is Paul brought into ministry. Reconciliation required Jesus coming *and* it took time.

How is the solution to our penchant for wall building as described by Paul in Ephesians different from the solutions offered by the world? How have you seen reconciliation through the person of Jesus bear out and work in your and others' lives?

*Closing thoughts—*

Reconciliation must come through the church. Ultimately, the Body of Christ is the only place that can uphold justice while clinging to the law of grace.

This is because at the head of the church is the love of the Nazarene.

The current divisive moment in America is a great opportunity to explore and display the church's unique bonds of love.

What in particular stood out to you in this sermon? What might Christ be saying to you?

What is one thing from this sermon you can apply to your life this week?